



DELAWARE

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

NEWS RELEASE

DelDOT Public Relations

1-800-652-5600 or 302-760-2080

dot-public-relations@state.de.us

www.deldot.net

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Contact: Darrel Cole, Public Relations Manager

cell-302-632-5034

“Slow Down and Pay Attention” **Work Zone Safety Awareness Week**

**Photos available upon request*

Dover — Joe Watkinson has had many memorable moments in 20 years as a DelDOT equipment operator IV. But his most frightening moment came within a work zone soon after he started at DelDOT’s Magnolia Maintenance Yard on Briarbush Road.

“I was filling cracks in the pavement on (Route) 113 and as I was getting up and turning around, a safety cone hit me in the chest,” said Watkinson, 39. “Next thing I know a car races past within inches of me, loses control and hits a telephone pole. It happened so fast, I wouldn’t have had time to move if I wanted to.”

To recognize the challenging work of employees in DelDOT’s Traffic, Maintenance, Construction, Pavement, Planning and Bridge divisions and DelDOT contractors, the department is hosting two Work Zone Safety Awareness ceremonies on April 4, the first at 10 a.m. at the Route 202 and Weldin Road Connector in Wilmington, and the second at 2 p.m. on DelDOT’s Danner Campus on Bay Road in Dover. The events are part of Work Zone Safety Awareness Week, which runs from April 3-9. DelDOT is reminding travelers to drive with caution within work zones and respect the job and the lives of these men and women. The reason is due to these startling and frightening statistics:

- In Delaware in 2004, two workers were killed in crashes in or near work zones.
- Nationally, one work zone fatality occurs every seven hours.
- Nationally, one work zone injury occurs every 15 minutes.
- Four out of five work zone fatalities are motorists.

Speaking at the 2 p.m. event will be DelDOT Secretary Nathan Hayward III, while both events will feature workers sharing their personal experiences within the work zone.

Secretary Hayward said he hopes that drivers through work zones pay heed to the men and women working there.

“We can’t stress enough how important it is for drivers to slow down and pay attention,” Hayward said. “We must remember our workers have families, children who love them, and parents that are proud of them. This is more than about drivers obeying the law. It’s about respecting these people and the place they work in.”

Donna Hardy, DelDOT’s Safety Programs Engineer in the Traffic division, said it is her experience that drivers are so used to seeing construction on roadways that they pay little attention to work zones.

“At any given time 20 percent of roadways are under construction of some type, so when they encounter work, it doesn’t raise concerns to the driver,” Hardy said. “That’s when bad things happen. What we want to focus on

is when work zones are encountered, drivers must pay attention not only for their own safety but for the safety of the workers too.”

The job workers do is difficult enough without having to deal with speeding or inattentive drivers.

Tom Murray, 29, of Dover, a DelDOT equipment operator III, recalls the time a few years ago when he witnessed a flagger get hit by a car. Luckily the worker was not seriously injured, but it’s an image Murray will never forget.

“I can still see the driver talking away on her cell phone even as she hit our guy,” Murray said. “I always think about that when I’m out there in the work zone. All we ask is that people give us the same respect they would give to anyone’s work space.”

Barry Dye, a foreman with contractor George & Lynch Inc., and DelDOT’s Watkinson also have more to worry about than their own safety. Each is married and has two and three children, respectively.

“I would like people to put themselves in our shoes,” said Dye, 44, of Wyoming. “Last year we were doing a patching job on Route 1, and the worst thing drivers did was jockey for position as the safety barrels gradually shift the lanes into one. Those people didn’t care, hitting barrels and not worrying about us just so they could get ahead of the next car. There was one incident where a driver hit a barrel that was just five feet from workers. It puts a scare in you, that’s for sure.”

Watkinson has taken lessons from his experiences that he now uses as a foreman of work zone crews.

“It’s all about safety for us out there,” Watkinson said. “From that point on I was more aware of vehicles and I’ve made sure that I am always keeping an eye on the workers, making sure they’re doing the right things and staying safe.”

While DelDOT requires its employees to get regular work zone safety training, workers want to remind drivers that work zones are designed to warn motorists of upcoming hazards. When traveling through a work zone, please pay careful attention to the traffic control devices present.

- Warning signs will let you know what to expect.
- Drums or cones will delineate your path of travel.
- Flag persons will help direct you along the way. When you see the “orange and black”, please be extra cautious.
- Slow down and expect the unexpected.

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